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Subtractive Schooling, Caring Relations, and Social Capital in the Schooling of U.S.-Mexican Youth

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SCHOOLS SUBTRACT RESOURCES from youth in two major ways. The first involves a process of "de-Mexicanization," or subtracting students' culture and language, which is consequential to their achievement and orientations toward school. The second involves the role of caring between teachers and students in the educational process. De-Mexicanization erodes students' social capital (Coleman 1988, 1990; also see Stanton-Salazar, 1997), by making it difficult for constructive social ties to develop between immigrant and U.S.-born youth. By *social capital*, I mean the social ties that connect students to each other, as well as the levels of resources (like academic skills and knowledge) that characterize their friendship groups. This dynamic is of special consequence to regular-track, U.S.-born Mexican youth, who often lack a well-defined and effective achievement orientation.

Regarding caring, teachers expect students to *care about* school in a technical fashion before they *care for* them, while students expect teachers to *care for* them before they *care about* school. By dismissing students' definition of education—an orientation thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture and advanced by caring theorists (e.g., Noddings, 1984, 1992)—schooling subtracts resources from youth.

After describing the study I undertook at Seguin High School,¹ I explain how I derived the concept of 'subtractive schooling.' This description incorporates my concerns about current theorizing (especially see Portes, 1995) that narrowly casts achievement differences between immigrant and U.S.-born youth as evidence of "downward assimilation." I then elaborate on how culture and caring relations are involved in the process of subtractive schooling. Throughout, I draw selectively on both quantitative and qualitative evidence that lends support to my thesis.

THE SEGUIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDY

Seguin High is a large, comprehensive, inner-city high school located in the Houston Independent School District. Its 3,000-plus student body is virtually all Mexican and generationally diverse (45 percent immigrant and 55 percent U.S. born).² Teachers, on the other hand, are predominantly non-Latino. Currently, 81 percent are non-Latino, and 19 percent are Latino (mostly Mexican American).

Seguin's failure and dropout rates are very high. In 1992 a full quarter of the freshman class repeated the grade for at least a second time, and a significant portion of these were repeating the ninth grade a third and fourth time. An average of 300 students skip daily. Between 1,200 and 1,500 students enter the 9th grade each year and only 400 to 500 students graduate in any given year. Low expectations are virtually built into this school: Were students to progress normally from one grade to the next, there would be no space to house them. As things stand, Seguin's 3,000-plus student body is crammed into a physical facility capable of housing no more than 2,600. Because of the school's high failure and dropout rates, the freshman class makes up more than half of the school population.

An ethnic brand of politics that has focused on problems in the school has made for a contentious relationship between Seguin and its surrounding community. Although local community activists have historically supported numerous causes, including legal challenges against segregation during the early 1970s, a massive student walkout in October 1989, and a number of school reforms such as site-based management, little has changed to significantly alter its underachieving profile. Seguin is locked in inertia. Steeped in a logic of technical rationality, schooling centers on questions of how best to administer the curriculum rather than on why, as presently organized, it tends to block the educational mobility of huge segments of its student body. Excepting those located in the privileged rungs of the curriculum—that is, honors classes, the magnet school program, and the upper levels of the Career and Technology Education (CTE) vocational program³—the academic trajectories of the vast majority are highly circumscribed. Because as a group, 9th graders

are especially "at risk," I tried to talk to as many of them as possible and to incorporate their voices and experiences into this ethnographic account.

Although my study makes use of quantitative data, the key modes of data collection are based on participant observation and open-ended interviews with individuals and with groups of students. Group interviews enabled me not only to tap into peer-group culture but also to investigate the social, cultural, and linguistic divisions that I observed among teenagers at Seguin. Before elaborating my framework, I will first address relevant survey findings that pertain to parental education, schooling orientations, and generational differences in achievement.⁴

First, students' parental education levels are very low, hovering around nine years of schooling completed for third-generation students.⁵ Though higher than the average for parents of first-generation respondents (i.e., six years of schooling), a "high" of nine for the U.S.-born population means that parents have little educational "advantage" to confer to their children (Lareau 1989). That is, most parents have either no high school experience or a negative one to pass on to their progeny. Rather than aberrant, this finding is consistent with Chapa (1988), who found that third-generation Mexican Americans in the state of Texas complete an average of 9.3 years of education and that the dropout rate is 56 percent.⁶

These data indicate that with such low average attainment levels, the major responsibility for education falls on the school by default. School officials, however, tend not to see it this way. They tend to blame the students, their parents, their culture, and their community for their educational failure. This tendency on the part of teachers and administrators to blame children, parents, and community has been amply observed in ethnographies of minority youth in urban schools (Fine, 1991; Peshkin, 1991; Yeo, 1997; McQuillan, 1998).

Complicating matters—and reinforcing many teachers' and other school officials' opinion that students "don't care" about school—is that a significant proportion of students, mostly U.S. born, have become adept at breaking school rules. For example, they skip class and attend all three lunch periods knowing that the numbers are on their side and that they are unlikely to get processed even if they get spotted by school officials. A common scenario is the presence of several administrators in the school cafeteria alongside scores of students whom they know are skipping class. The sheer amount of time, paperwork, and effort that would be required to process every offender discourages massive action. In short, violations of school policies are so common that they outstrip the administration's capacity to address them, making Seguin a capricious environment that minimizes many students' sense of control, on the one hand, and their respect toward authority, on the other. Despite the fact that certain types of students, discussed shortly, consistently succeed, the prevailing view is that students "don't care."

Another finding from survey data corroborated in the ethnographic account is that immigrant youth experience school significantly more positively than do their U.S.-born peers. That is, they see teachers as more caring and accessible than do their U.S.-born counterparts, and they rate the school climate in more positive terms as well. They are also much less likely to evade school rules and policies. These students' attitudes contrast markedly with those of their second- and third-generation counterparts, whose responses in turn are not significantly different from one another. Particularly striking is how generational status—and not gender or curriculum track placement—influences orientations toward schooling.

Because of its relevance, I interject at this point how ethnographic evidence additionally reveals that immigrant, more than U.S.-born, youth belong to informal peer groups that exhibit an esprit-de-corps, proschool ethos. Immigrants' collective achievement strategies, when combined with the academic competence their prior schooling provides, directly affect their level of achievement. Academic competence thus functions as a human-capital variable that, when marshaled in the context of the peer group, *becomes* a social-capital variable (Coleman, 1988, 1990). This process is especially evident among females in Seguin's immigrant student population (see Valenzuela, 1999). In contrast, and borrowing from Putnam (1993, 1995), regular-track, U.S.-born youth are "socially decapitalized." Through a protracted, institutionally mediated process of de-Mexicanization that results in a deidentification from the Spanish language, Mexico, and things Mexican, they lose an organic connection to those among them who are academically oriented. U.S.-born youth are no less solidaristic; their social ties are simply devoid of academically productive social capital.

Finally, quantitative evidence points to significantly higher academic achievement among immigrants than among U.S.-born youth located in the regular track. Though not controlling for curriculum track placement, other scholars have observed this tendency among Mexican and Central American students (Buriel, 1984; Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Suárez-Orozco, 1991; Vigil & Long, 1981). This finding has been primarily interpreted from an individual assimilationist perspective rather than from a critical analysis of assimilating institutions.

Invoking a generational analysis of change, classic assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964) suggests that achievement should improve generationally if assimilation worked for Mexicans in the way that it has worked for European-origin immigrant groups in the United States. Though unintended, this generational model encourages a construction of U.S.-born youth as "deficient" and as fundamentally lacking in the drive and enthusiasm possessed by their immigrant counterparts. Drawing on several works that examine the phenomenon of oppositionality among minority youth (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Ogbu, 1991), Portes and Zhou (1993, 1994) conclude

that U.S.-born minority youth are members of "adversarial cultures" (or "reactive subcultures"). They convey the imagery of a downward achievement spiral that accompanies the assimilation process, culminating, often by the second generation, in a devaluation of education as a key route to mobility. Sorely lacking in their account is an understanding of the myriad ways in which powerful institutions such as schools are implicated in both the curtailment of students' educational mobility and, consequently, in the very development of the alleged "adversarial culture" about which Portes and Zhou express concern.

My data show that institutionalized curricular tracking is a good place to begin assessing the academic well-being of the would-be socially ascendant. That is, the previously observed pattern of higher immigrant achievement vis-à-vis U.S.-born underachievement is *only* evident among youth within the regular, noncollege-bound track. In other words, as one would expect, location in the college-bound track erases these differences. At Seguin, however, the vast majority of youth are located in the regular academic track. Only between 10 and 14 percent of the entire student body is ever located in either honors courses, the magnet school program, or the upper-levels of the Career and Technology Education (CTE) vocational program (see Oakes, 1985; O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, this volume; Olsen, 1997).

To categorically characterize U.S.-born Mexican youth as emanating from cultures that do not value achievement is to at once treat them as if they were a monolith and to promote an invidious distinction. Key institutional mechanisms such as tracking—and, as I shall shortly argue, subtractive schooling—mediate and have always mediated achievement outcomes. That most minority youth, however, are not located in the college-bound track should not keep us from recognizing the power of such placement: It is there where they acquire privileged access to the necessary skills, resources, and conditions for social ascendancy within schools, and ultimately, within society.

Beyond the "blind spot" in the assimilation literature overlooking the significance of tracking, the limitations of assimilation theory to account for differences in achievement between immigrant and U.S.-born youth becomes further apparent through a close examination of the subtractive elements of schooling. The theoretical question that emerges from the framework I have elaborated is not whether we bear witness to "downward assimilation," as Portes (1995) suggests, but rather *how schooling subtracts resources from youth*.

THE CONCEPT OF SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING

I derive the concept of 'subtractive' in the phrase *subtractive schooling* from the sociolinguistic literature that regards assimilation as a nonneutral process (Cummins, 1981, 1986; Gibson, 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). Schooling involves either adding on a second culture and language or subtracting one's

original culture and language. An additive outcome would be fully vested bilingualism and biculturalism. Whenever Mexican youth emerge from the schooling process as monolingual individuals who are neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in the mainstream of the United States, subtraction can be said to have occurred.

There is no neutral category for schooling because the status quo is subtractive and inscribed in public policy: the Texas Bilingual Education Code is a transitional policy framework.⁷ The state's English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum is designed to impart to nonnative English speakers sufficient verbal and written skills to effectuate their transition into an all-English curriculum within a three-year time period. Under these circumstances, maintaining and developing students' bilingual and bicultural abilities is to swim against the current.

Though 'subtractive' and 'additive bilingualism' are well-established concepts in the sociolinguistic literature, they have yet to be applied to either the organization of schooling or the structure of caring relationships. Instead, the bulk of this literature emphasizes issues pertaining to language acquisition and maintenance. Merging these concerns with current evidence and theorizing in the nascent comparative literature on immigrant and ethnic minority youth—as I do in this chapter—is fruitful, broadening the scope of empirical inquiry. Currently, the literature addresses differences in perceptions and attitudes toward schooling among immigrant and ethnic minority youth, as well as the adaptational coping strategies they use to negotiate the barriers they face in achieving their goals (e.g., Gibson, 1988, 1993; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1997). While I address this in my work as well, it is also worthwhile to investigate how the organizational features of schooling relate to the production of minority status and identities, on the one hand, and how these productions relate to achievement and orientations toward schooling, on the other.

I derive the concept of 'schooling' in 'subtractive schooling' from the social reproduction literature, which views schools as actually "working"—that is, if their job is to reproduce the social order along race, class, and gender lines (e.g., Callahan, 1962; Giroux, 1988; Olsen, 1997). Academic success and failure are presented here more as products of schooling than as something that young people do. Of course, the manifest purpose of schooling is not to reproduce inequality, but the latent effect is that with which we must contend.

Segregated and generationally diverse, Seguin proved to be a natural laboratory for investigating reproduction theory. One can see what students are like when they enter school as immigrants and what they look like after having been processed. The combined terms 'subtractive' and 'schooling' thus bring the school into greater focus than has much of the previous literature on ethnic minority, but especially Mexican, schooling.

THE PROCESS OF SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING

Language and Culture

"No Spanish" rules were a ubiquitous feature of U.S.-Mexican schooling through the early 1970s (San Miguel, 1987). They have been abolished, but Mexican youth continue to be subjected on a daily basis to subtle, negative messages that undermine the worth of their unique culture and history. The structure of Seguin's curriculum is typical of most public high schools with large concentrations of Mexican youth. It is designed to divest them of their Mexican identities and to impede their prospects for fully vested bilingualism and biculturalism. The single (and rarely taught) course on Mexican American history aptly reflects the students' marginalized status in the formal curriculum.

On a more personal level, students' cultural identities are systematically derogated and diminished. Stripped of their usual appearance, youth entering Seguin get "disinfected" of their identifications in a way that bears striking resemblance to the prisoners and mental patients in Goffman's essays on asylums and other "total institutions" (1977). ESL youth, for example, are regarded as "limited English proficient" rather than as "Spanish dominant" and/or as potentially bilingual. Their fluency in Spanish is construed as a "barrier" that needs to be overcome. Indeed, school personnel frequently insist that once "the language barrier" is finally eliminated, Seguin's dismal achievement record will disappear as well. The belief in English as the panacea is so strong that it outweighs the hard evidence confronting classroom teachers every day: The overwhelming majority of U.S.-born, monolingual, English-speaking youth in Seguin's regular track do not now, have not in the past, and likely will not in the future prosper academically.

Another routine way in which the everyday flow of school life erodes the importance of cultural identity is through the casual revisions that faculty and staff make in students' names. At every turn, even well-meaning teachers "adapt" their students' names: *Loreto* becomes *Laredo*; *Azucena* is transformed into *Suzy*. Because teachers and other school personnel typically lack familiarity with stress rules in Spanish, surnames are especially vulnerable to linguistic butchering. Even names that are common throughout the Southwest, like Martinez and Perez, are mispronounced as MART-i-nez and Pe-REZ. Schooling under these conditions can thus be characterized as a mortification of the self in Goffman's terms—that is, as a leaving off and a taking on.

Locating Spanish in the Foreign Language Department also implicates Seguin in the process of subtraction. This structure treats Mexicans as any other immigrant group originating from distant lands and results in course offerings that do not correspond to students' needs. Because Spanish is conceived of as similar to such "foreign languages" as French and German, the

majority of the courses are offered at the beginning and intermediate levels only. Very few advanced Spanish-language courses exist. Rather than designing the program with the school's large number of native speakers in mind, Seguin's first- and second-year Spanish curriculum subjects students to material that insults their abilities.

Taking beginning Spanish means repeating such elementary phrases as "Yo me llamo María." (My name is María.) "Tú te llamas José." (Your name is José.) Even students whose linguistic competence is more passive than active—that is, they understand but speak little Spanish—are ill served by this kind of approach. A passively bilingual individual possesses much greater linguistic knowledge and ability than another individual exposed to the language for their first time. Since almost every student at Seguin is either a native speaker of Spanish or an active or passive bilingual, the school's Spanish program ill serves all, though not even-handedly. To be relevant, the curricular pyramid would have to be reversed, with far fewer beginning courses and many more advanced-level courses in Spanish.

Subtraction is further inscribed in Seguin's tracking system. That is, the regular curriculum track is subdivided into two tracks—the regular, English-only, and the ESL track. This practice of nonacademic "cultural tracking" fosters social divisions among youth along cultural and linguistic lines and limits the educational mobility of all youth. A status hierarchy that relegates immigrant youth to the bottom gets established, enabling the development of a "politics of difference" (McCarthy, 1993). That is, immigrant and U.S.-born youth develop "we-they" distinctions that sabotage communication and preclude bridge building.

The sharp division that exists between immigrant and U.S.-born youth is a striking feature, particularly when one considers that many of the U.S.-born students have parents and grandparents who are from Mexico. However, such divisions have been observed among Mexican adults as well (Rodriguez & Nuñez, 1986). This discussion should not be taken to mean that immigrants should not be accorded their much-needed, and often deficient, language support systems. I simply want to express that the broader Mexican community's collective interest to achieve academically gets compromised by a schooling process that exacerbates and reproduces differences among youth.

Regarding mobility, time-honored practices make it virtually impossible for ESL youth to make a vertical move from the ESL to the honors track. Never mind that many immigrant youth attended *secundaria* (known more formally as *educación media*) in Mexico. Since only 16.9 percent of the total middle school-age population in Mexico attends *secundaria*, any *secundaria* experience is exceptional (Gutek, 1993). Though members of an "elite" group, they are seldom recognized or treated as such by school officials, including counselors who either do not know how to interpret a transcript from Mexico or who are ignorant about the significance of a postprimary educational experience.

rience. Such negligent practices helped me understand immigrant youth who told me, "I used to be smarter." "I used to know math."

Ironically, the stigmatized status of immigrants—especially the more "amexicanados"—endures vis-à-vis their Mexican American peers, enhances their peer group solidarity, and protects them from the seductive elements of the peer group culture characteristic of their U.S.-born counterparts. Immigrant students' proschool, esprit-de-corps ethos (that explains their ESL teachers' affectionate references to them as "organized cheaters") finds no parallel in the schooling experiences of U.S.-born youth. Immigrants' collective achievement strategies, when combined with the academic competence their prior schooling provides, translate into academically productive social capital.

Disassociation and deidentification with immigrant youth and Mexican culture have no such hidden advantage for Mexican American youth. The English-dominant and strongly peer-oriented students who walk daily through Seguin's halls, vacillating between displays of aggressiveness and indifference, are either underachieving or psychically and emotionally detached from the academic mainstream. Hence, for U.S.-born youth, to be culturally assimilated is to become culturally and linguistically distant from those among them who are academically able. Thus eroded in the process of schooling is students' social capital. Within a span of two or three generations, "social decapitalization" may be said to occur. Under such conditions, teachers become highly influential and even necessary gatekeepers. Hence the significance of caring relations.

Caring Relations

Regardless of nativity, students' definition of education, embodied in the term *educación*, gets dismissed. Interestingly, the concept of *educación* approximates the optimal definition of education advanced by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Being an educated person within Mexican culture carries with it its own distinctive connotation (Mejía, 1983; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1991). *Ser bien educado/a* (to be well educated) is to not only possess book knowledge but to also live responsibly in the world as a caring human being, respectful of the individuality and dignity of others. Though one may possess many credentials, one is poorly educated (*mal educado/a*) if deficient in respect, manners, and responsibility toward others, especially family members.

Following from students' definition of education is the implicit notion that learning should be premised on *authentic* caring, to use Noddings' (1984) terminology. That is, learning should be premised on *relation* with teachers and other school adults having as their chief concern their students' entire well-being. In contrast to their teachers' expectations, Seguin youth prefer to be *cared for* before they *care about* school, especially when the curriculum is

impersonal, irrelevant, and test driven. U.S.-born students, in particular, display psychic and emotional detachment from a schooling process organized around *aesthetic*, or superficial, caring. Such caring accords emphasis to form and nonpersonal content (e.g., rules, goals, and "the facts") and only secondarily, if at all, to their students' subjective reality.

The benefit of profound connection to the student is the development of a sense of competence and mastery over worldly tasks. In the absence of such connectedness, students are not only reduced to the level of objects; they may also be diverted from learning the skills necessary for mastering their academic and social environment. Thus, the difference in the ways in which students and teachers perceive school-based relationships can have direct bearing on students' potential to achieve.

Caring becomes political, however, when teachers and students hold different definitions of caring and the latter are unable to insert their definition of caring into the schooling process because of their weaker power position. Mexican American youth frequently choose clothing and accessories such as baggy pants and multilayered gold necklaces that "confirm" their teachers' suspicions that they really do not care about school. Withdrawal and apathy in the classroom mix with occasional displays of aggression toward school authorities. This makes them easy to write off as "lazy underachievers."

U.S.-born youth indeed engage in what Ogbu calls "cultural inversion" whereby they consciously or unconsciously oppose the culture and cognitive styles associated with the dominant group (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). However, they do so mainly in the realm of self-representation. In contrast to what Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Matute-Bianchi (1991) have observed among African American and Mexican American youth in their studies, strong achievement orientations among youth at Seguin are never best interpreted as attempts on their part to "act white." Instead, proschool youth are simply dismissed as "nerdy" or "geeky." Rather than education, it is *schooling* they resist—especially the dismissal of their definition of education.

Some of the most compelling evidence that students do care about education despite their rejection of schooling lies with the great number of students who skip most classes chronically but who regularly attend that one class that is meaningful to them. Without exception, it is the teacher there who makes the difference. Unconditional, authentic caring resides therein.

Seguin's immigrant students often share their U.S.-born peers' view that learning should be premised on a humane and compassionate pedagogy inscribed in reciprocal relationships, but their sense of being privileged to attend secondary school saps any desire they might have to insert their definition of education into the schooling process. Immigrant students therefore respond to the exhortation that they "care about" school differently from U.S.-born youth. Immigrant students acquiesce and are consequently seen by their teachers as polite and deferential. Their grounded sense of identity further

combines with their unfamiliarity with the Mexican American experience to enable them to "care about" school without the threat of language or culture loss or even the burden of cultural derogation when their sights are set on swiftly acculturating toward the mainstream. U.S.-born youth in Seguin's regular track, on the other hand, typically respond by either withdrawing or rebelling. *Caring about* threatens their ethnic identity, their sense of self.

Frank's story illustrates one student's resistance to schooling, the productive potential of a caring relationship at school, and the debilitating effects of a curriculum that fails to validate his ethnic identity. He is an unusually reflective ninth-grader. As a "C-student," he achieves far below his potential. His own alienation from schooling accounts for his poor motivation:

I don't get with the program because then it's doing what *they* [teachers] want for my life. I see *mexicanos* who follow the program so they can go to college, get rich, move out of the *barrio*, and never return to give back to their *gente* (people). Is that what this is all about? If I get with the program, I'm saying that's what it's all about and that teachers are right when they're not.

Frank resists caring about school not because he is unwilling to become a productive member of society, but rather because to do so is tantamount to cultural genocide. He is consciously at odds with the narrow definition of success that most school officials hold. This definition asks him to measure his self-worth against his ability to get up and out of the *barrio* along an individualist path to success divorced from the social and economic interests of the broader Mexican community. With his indifference, this profoundly mature young adult deliberately challenges Seguin's implicit demand that he derogate his culture and community.

Frank's critique of schooling approximates that of Tisa, another astute U.S.-born, female student whom I came across in the course of my group interviews. When I ask her whether she thinks a college education is necessary in order to have a nice house and a nice car and to live in a nice neighborhood, she provided the following response: "You can make good money dealing drugs, but all the dealers—even if they drive great cars—they still spend their lives in the 'hood. Not to knock the 'hood at all. . . . If only us *raza* (the Mexican American people) could find a way to have all three, money . . . *clean* money, education, and the 'hood."

In a very diplomatic way, Tisa took issue with the way I framed my question. Rather than setting up two mutually compatible options of being successful and remaining in one's home community, Tisa interpreted my question in *either/or terms*, which in her mind unfairly counterposed success to living in the 'hood. That I myself failed to anticipate its potentially subtractive logic caused me to reflect on the power of the dominant narrative of mobility in U.S. society—an "out-of-the-*barrio*" motif, as it were (Chavez, 1991).

Thus, for alienated youth such as Frank and Tisa to buy into "the program," success needs to be couched in additive, both/and terms that preserve their psychic and emotional desire to remain socially responsible members of their communities. These findings bring to mind the ethos that Ladson-Billings (1994) identifies as central to culturally relevant pedagogy for African American youth. Specifically, effective teachers of African American children see their role as one of "giving back to the community." For socially and culturally distant teachers, such discernment and apprehending of "the other" is especially challenging and can only emerge when the differential power held by teachers of culturally different students is taken fully into account (Nodding, 1984, 1992; Paley, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

CONCLUSION

Schools such as Seguin High School are faced with a special challenge. To significantly alter the stubborn pattern of underachievement, they need to become authentically caring institutions. To become authentically caring institutions, they need to at once stop subtracting resources from youth and deal with the effects of subtraction. Although it is up to each school to determine what a more additive perspective might entail, my study suggests that an important point of departure is a critical examination of the existing curriculum.

The operant model of schooling structurally deprives acculturated, U.S.-born youth of social capital that they would otherwise enjoy were the school not so aggressively (subtractively) assimilationist. Stated differently, rather than students failing schools, schools fail students with a pedagogical logic that not only assures the ascendancy of a few but also jeopardizes their access to those among them who are either academically strong or who belong to academically supportive networks.

Although the possession of academically productive social capital presents itself as a decided advantage for immigrant youth, analytical restraint is in order here as well. However "productive" it may be, social capital is still no match against an invisible system of tracking that excludes the vast majority of youth. Strategizing for the next assignment or exam does not guarantee that the exclusionary aspects of schooling will either cease or magically come to light. Even should it come to light, the power to circumvent regular-track placement remains an issue, especially for the more socially marginal. Most sobering is the thought that in some ultimate sense, schooling is subtractive for all.

SIX

The Ideology of "Fag"

The School Experience of Gay Students

George W. Smith

(completed for publication by Dorothy E. Smith)

Gay and lesbian youth attend schools throughout the nation. . . . These students—from every ethnic and racial background, in urban, suburban, and rural schools—have sat passively through years of public school education where their identities as gay and lesbian people have been ignored and denied. They have done this because of their own fears and isolation, and because of the failure of gay men and lesbians to effectively take up their cause.

—E. Rofes, "Opening Up the Classroom Closet"

THE IDEOLOGY OF "FAG" is key to the organization of the heterosexist/homophobic dimensions of the school regime. It is a practice in language. Mikhail Bakhtin's work is used to devise ways of "seeing" social organization in the speech and graffiti in which the ideology of "fag" is realized in schools. His conception of the dialogic explicates the relationship between researcher and informants, as well as the dialogues internal to informants' narratives. Excerpts from their stories create windows into the local practices of the ideology of fag as they experienced it and made available the social organization of their everyday school lives. Analysis focuses on how speech, whether as verbal abuse or homophobic graffiti, concerts antigay activities, articulating to the wider organization of gender and the school as a regime.